



IKT – CONCEPTUAL OUTLINES

Habsburg Knowledge Initiative: Central European Knowledge-Making in Global History

A New Core Agenda at the Cultures of Knowledge Research Focus of the IKT/ Austrian Academy of Sciences, conceptualized by Johannes Feichtinger and Franz L. Fillafer, July 2019

By repositioning Habsburg Central Europe as a catalyst and clearing house for the global circulation of people, goods, ideas and practices, our research initiative formulates and tests a novel paradigm for the study of culture: We contend that knowledge is always produced in interaction; there is no such thing as pristine and pure knowledge lodged in one, single, exclusive place of origin. Accordingly, interaction is the chief site of knowledge-making. This approach entails two interventions: Firstly, we steer clear of the study of self-enhancing ‘representations’ of the exotic other by exposing the mediated and co-produced nature of these imageries, and move beyond benignly self-propelling ‘flows’. Secondly, the new focus on knowledge production enables us to retrieve the situated prerequisites and obstacles, the institutionalized structures and processes that foster and foil, freeze and re-initiate interaction. It accords leverage to the previously neglected work of brokers and mediators, as well as to the media of translation.

Our initiative

- conceptualizes global history, not as an account of free-floating universals, but as a result of inter-local exchanges
- de-provincializes Central Europe by throwing into relief its relational histories, the empire’s profile of interaction with the wider world, and the consequences of this entanglement for knowledge production
- shows how Central European scholars and scientists grasped and shaped the religious, legal and linguistic diversity of their imperial polity. The conceptual portfolio produced within the empire connected its local plurality to global concerns, and it was precisely this nexus that gave the Central European epistemic toolkit its worldwide resonance
- highlights the power-inflected nature of all knowledge-making in relation to the needs of the state, international power rivalries, and ecclesiastical, economic and social contexts
- focuses on the materiality of knowledge production instead of merely following the paper trails of epistolary exchange
- contributes to the socio-economic history of science by moving beyond the trailblazing thin upper crust of scholars—it rediscovers a creative milieu of worldmaking artisans, printers, craftsmen, technicians and merchants

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